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Charting the Course for the Future of Military Health care

Filed under HEATH, LEADERSHIP, MILITARY MEDICINE (NO COMMENTS)

By Vice Adm. Matthew L. Nathan, U.S. Navy Surgeon General



Vice Adm. Matthew Nathan, Navy surgeon general, speaks during the second day of plenary sessions during the 2012 Military Health System (MHS) Conference held at the Gaylord National Hotel and Convention Center in National Harbor, Md., Feb. 1, 2012. The MHS aims to ensure the medical readiness of U.S. service members, and to provide a ready medical force. (DoD photo by Johnny Bivera, DoD)

The [Military Health System](#) and [Navy Medicine](#) have done the amazing and exceeded expectations over the past decade. We have not only established the highest survivability rate in the history of war but the medical advancements we’ve achieved will benefit the U.S. public and global health systems for countless people for decades to come.

While we have achieved much, we need to be constantly asking ourselves the tough questions as we navigate some uncharted and uncertain times. How are we going to position ourselves to continue to meet the needs of our warfighters and their families? How will we work to sustain the high state of medical readiness that is demanded of us? How do we continue to provide

today’s high quality health care in an era of greater fiscal constraints and strategic change?

With these questions in mind, we in Navy Medicine have begun looking downrange to determine where and how we should be positioned 5, 10 and 20 years from now to provide the best return on the nation’s investment in quality health care for its naval forces. To drill down on this concept, I recently hosted a workshop for my most senior military and civilian leaders in Navy Medicine to answer these pressing questions and chart the way ahead.

It is an understatement to say that we live in dynamic times. We face some very interesting challenges and it is vital that we assembled our A-team to get together and discuss them. Challenges are not unique to us, as everyone faces the challenges defined by their era. I would surmise that if John Paul Jones and James T. Kirk had the opportunity to get together, they would share tales about the interesting, and perhaps similar problems of their day. I would state that our real and fictional heroes would simply say that you have to meet change head on, recognize where it’s happening and look for the opportunities to embrace it.

Navy Medicine Video

Navy Medicine is a global healthcare network of 63,000 Navy medical personnel around the world who provide high quality health care to more than one million eligible beneficiaries. Navy Medicine personnel deploy with Sailors and Marines worldwide, providing critical mission support aboard ship, in the air, under the sea and on the battlefield.

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March 2015 (1)

February 2015 (16)

January 2015 (12)

December 2014 (17)

One key challenge we face today is to concentrate on bringing more value and jointness to military healthcare while maintaining the high state of medical readiness for our naval forces that our nation demands. After a decade of combat operations, we are more joint today that we were yesterday and we will be more joint tomorrow than we are today. While the Navy will always have a unique mission set and identity, we also need to recognize that the world is changing. Our nation's leaders expect the military to become more efficient and consolidate in certain areas that make sense and my workshop set a course to make recommendations in areas of health care where it would make sense to be more joint. Our goal is to lead the way and help work with our sister services to develop joint healthcare solutions and recommendations that make sense.

It is often difficult to define what “jointness” really means as it's not something that is tangible, but we're opening the doors to rethinking and really engaging on how to achieve this.

In an effort to provide clarity on our current challenges, my senior leaders were divided into individual goal teams with specific timelines and clear objectives to developing strategies to achieve success in the key focus areas identified. We had some excellent discussions during the workshop on everything from combat casualty care to humanitarian assistance/disaster relief. We are now working to get a product out in the coming months full of business-based recommendations and proposals to share with Navy leadership and our sister services. This is to better position military health care to meet the current mission AND better prepare ourselves for the emerging challenges that await us over the horizon. When the world dials 9-1-1, it is not to make an appointment and we must always be ready for the next call to action.

The leadership team will reconvene this fall to brief their recommendations and solidify the way forward.

Stay tuned... you have the watch at challenging and pivotal times as we make flank speed.

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November 2014 (11)
October 2014 (15)
September 2014 (20)
August 2014 (14)
July 2014 (13)
June 2014 (8)
May 2014 (11)
April 2014 (9)
March 2014 (14)
February 2014 (7)
January 2014 (7)
December 2013 (7)
November 2013 (12)
October 2013 (7)
September 2013 (14)
August 2013 (13)
July 2013 (11)
June 2013 (22)
May 2013 (15)
April 2013 (14)
March 2013 (14)
February 2013 (14)
January 2013 (12)
December 2012 (11)
November 2012 (11)
October 2012 (7)
September 2012 (9)
August 2012 (12)
July 2012 (13)
June 2012 (17)
May 2012 (22)
April 2012 (14)
March 2012 (13)
February 2012 (14)
January 2012 (13)
December 2011 (13)
November 2011 (20)
October 2011 (22)
September 2011 (12)